

Pardis/Paradise: Cosmic Symbolism in Persian Gardens and its Cultural and Spiritual Echoes

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Introduction

This paper explores the rich realm of Persian gardens, tracing their origins to Mesopotamia and ancient Iran. Renowned as 'Pardis,' these gardens are intricate tapestries woven with cosmic symbolism, mythological narratives, and spiritual philosophies, offering a profound reflection of paradise on earth. This study aims to articulate how these geometrical landscapes reflect architectural symbolism across various cultures, exploring their embodiment of ancient philosophical and cosmological beliefs, and illustrating their influence across different cultures and periods. The peoples of Persia began constructing formal gardens as early as the Achaemenid era (500-300 B.C.), reaching their zenith during the Sassanian era (A.D. 226-641), with magnificent gardens laid out in the Mandala design. The advent of Islam in the 600s brought new refinements to these concepts, leading to the creation of noteworthy Persian gardens that embodied design philosophies rooted in Sufi tradition (Shirvani 1985).

Cosmological Symbolism and Historical Context

Persian gardens are epitomes of aesthetic beauty and philosophical depth, deeply intertwined with the historical and cultural fabric of Iran. Their design principles, rooted in ancient cosmological conceptions, provide a unique perspective on the interplay between the natural world and the cosmos. This research will explore how the geometric layouts, water features, and botanical elements of these gardens symbolize the earthly manifestation of celestial order. The architectural design of Persian gardens is an allegory for the cosmic structure of the universe, deeply rooted in Ancient Iranian cosmology. The core concept of these walled gardens is the division into four by two perpendicular axes created by cross canals of water running from their center, mirroring the cosmic order according to the ancient Iranian mythologies. This layout is not merely ornamental but a profound manifestation of the cosmic cross, aligning physically and spiritually with celestial phenomena. The structures within the gardens also reflect this geometrical concept, echoing the cosmic symbolism of the heavens. Stronach's extensive work at Pasargadae provides crucial archaeological evidence supporting the symbolic and functional aspects of such designs. His findings highlight the sophisticated water management systems and the symbolic significance of garden layouts in echoing celestial and earthly paradigms (Stronach 1985).

Cultural Confluence and Architectural Expression

The influence of Persian gardens extends beyond their geographic origins, intertwining with Greek and Roman architectural traditions, and later expanding into India (Figure 1,2) and Spain during the Islamic era. This study analyzes the transference and adaptation of Persian garden design principles across these cultures, highlighting the gardens' role as a nexus for cultural and architectural exchange. By examining the historical pathways through which these design

principles traveled and transformed, the paper will shed light on the dynamic nature of cultural confluence in architectural expression. This exploration will include an analysis of how elements from Persian gardens were integrated into the architectural lexicon of the ancient world, impacting its landscape and urban design.

The origins of Persian gardens are intertwined with the royal nomadic tradition, where the mobility of Persian rulers influenced their design, emphasizing adaptability and reflecting the balance between temporary and permanent structures (O'Kane 1993). Persian gardens were designed with multifunctionality, transitioning seamlessly between administrative centers, military encampments, and pilgrimage sites, reflecting their adaptability to diverse cultural, political, and spiritual needs (Gharipour 2011).

Spiritual Essence in Architectural Spaces

At the heart of Persian gardens lies a profound spiritual essence, often infused with elements from various religious and mystical traditions. This study delves into how these gardens serve as spaces for spiritual experiences and contemplation. Drawing upon philosophical and spiritual texts, particularly those rooted in Sufi tradition, the paper discusses the gardens' role in facilitating a connection to the divine. This exploration not only highlights the spiritual symbolism embedded within the gardens but also demonstrates how they function as physical embodiments of transcendent unity and metaphysical concepts. Persian gardens, deeply rooted in Sufi philosophy, embody a harmonious blend of cosmic symbolism and Islamic mysticism, reflecting a spiritual journey that intertwines geometry, water, and plant life to create a sacred, contemplative space (Shirvani 1985). Persian gardens, characterized by their geometric chahar-bagh structure and intricate irrigation systems, represent a synthesis of cultural symbolism and environmental adaptation, embodying the cosmos with water channels symbolizing heavenly streams and trees symbolizing immortality. These gardens mirror Iran's rich cultural beliefs, integrating architectural ingenuity with spiritual symbolism to provide an earthly representation of paradise (Mahmoudi Farahani et al. 2016).

Conclusion

This research offers a deep analysis of Persian gardens, focusing on their origins and symbolism, and revealing their rich blend of architectural beauty, cultural depth, and spiritual significance. By delving into ancient cosmology and mythology, it provides a fresh perspective on how these gardens reflect ancient cosmological views and spiritual beliefs that shaped their design. The study highlights the historical importance and symbolic interpretations of these gardens, emphasizing their lasting legacy and significance in the context of architecture and urban design.



Figure 1: Top view of Lalbagh Qila, Dhaka. (Image in the public domain)



Figure 2: Layout of the Charbagh at the Tomb of Jahangir in Lahore. (Image in the public domain)

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